DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 060 471 CG 006 854

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TITLE Perception of the Occupational Opportunity Structure and Socialization to Achievement as Related to Sex and Race.
INSTITUTION Massachusetts Univ., Amherst.
PUB DATE Apr 71
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at Eastern Psychological Association Annual Meeting (42nd, New York, N. Y., April 15-17, 1971)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Discriminatory Attitudes (Social); Individual Differences; Racial Differences; *Racial Discrimination; *Sex Differences; *Working Women

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship of race and sex to college students' perceptions of occupational discrimination against blacks and against women. Blacks perceived more discrimination against black people than did whites. Black females perceived more discrimination against women than did either black males or white males. White females, however, perceived less discrimination against women than did either black males or white males. The results are interpreted in terms of the differential socialization for achievement by sex reported by blacks and whites. (Author)

ED 060471

PERCEPTION OF THE OCCUPATIONAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE AND SOCIALIZATION TO ACHIEVEMENT AS RELATED TO SEX AND RACE[1]

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The purpose of this study was to relate sex and race to individual perceptions of the occupational opportunity structure in American society and to retrospective reports of socialization for educational and occupational achievement. The occupational opportunity structure in American society refers to the differential openness or availability of various occupations to individuals possessing certain characteristics that are, in fact, differentially distributed among various occupations. In the present study, individual perceptions of the difference that sex and race make in the opportunity to enter various occupations were measured. The focus was upon individual perceptions, or subjective assessment, of the occupational opportunity structure, rather than upon the actual distribution among different occupations of people by sex and race in our society.

Socialization to achievement, which refers to the learning of values, attitudes and motives relevant to educational and occupational aspirations and success, was measured by retrospective reports of socialization to achievement in the family and in school. Educational and occupational aspirations were also ascertained.

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[1] Paper presented at the Forty-second Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, New York City, 1971.

CG 006 854

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It is clear that blacks and women are underrepresented in most of the occupations accorded high prestige in our society. It was hypothesized, therefore, that as compared to white respondents, black respondents would perceive the opportunity structure as more open to whites; and that as compared to male respondents, female respondents would perceive the opportunity structure as more open to men. Despite the fact that the average annual income of employed black females is lower than that of employed black males or of employed white females, much has been made in the literature of what Bernard (1966) has called the "unnatural superiority" of black women. Until very recently, black females have tended to be superior generally to black males in terms of education, occupation, and acculturating contacts with the white world. Despite the prevalence of sex discrimination in professional occupations, Bock (1969) noted that in the majority of occupations listed in the United States Census as "professional" occupations, the proportion of blacks that is female is greater than the proportion of whites that is female. This differential in favor of black females is more conspicuous for traditionally "masculine" professions, such as medicine and law, than for traditionally "feminine" professions, such as schoolteaching. An assumption of the present study, therefore, was that the occupational opportunities of black women as compared to those of black men may be overestimated within the black community. It was hypothesized that as compared to black male respondents, black female respondents would perceive

the opportunity structure as more open to blacks.

The sample. The sample was comprised of the entering freshman class at a state university. Of 2,886 white freshmen, there were 1,429 males and 1,457 females; and of 145 black freshmen, there were 75 males and 70 females.

The procedure. A questionnaire was administered as part of the testing and orientation sessions in which all entering freshmen participate during the summer preceding their entrance to the university. In addition to demographic information, questions included two scales of 21 occupations requesting the respondents to respectively estimate the degree of discrimination against black people and against women in entering each occupation. Most of the 21 occupations were high-prestige occupations requiring at least a bachelor's degree. Socialization to achievement items included questions about the degree and type of encouragement or discouragement regarding higher education and occupational attainment offered by significant others. Respondents' educational and occupational aspirations and expectations were also ascertained.

A single, overall measure of perceived occupational discrimination against black people, named Black Discrimination Total, was created by summing the scores of perceived discrimination against black people in each of the 21 occupations. The same technique was used to generate an overall measure of perceived occupational discrimination against women in the same 21 occupations, named Women Discrimination Total.

RESULTS. An analysis of variance was performed relating sex and race to Black Discrimination Total and to Women Discrimination Total. As hypothesized, black students perceived significantly more occupational discrimination against black people than did white students ($F=32.80$, $p<.001$). Sex as a main effect did not differentiate scores on Black Discrimination Total, nor did the hypothesized interaction effect occur. That is, as hypothesized, white males and white females did not differ in their subjective assessment of occupational discrimination against black people. However, the expected perception of significantly less discrimination against black people by black females as compared to black males did not occur; black females and black males did not differ in their perception of occupational discrimination against black people.

Inspection of the analysis of variance performed upon Women Discrimination Total revealed no main effect for race. That is, as hypothesized, black and white students did not differ in their perception of occupational discrimination against women. It was also hypothesized that female respondents would perceive significantly more occupational discrimination against women than would male respondents. Sex as a main effect did not differentiate scores on Women Discrimination Total. However, inspection of the interaction effect showed that black females perceived significantly more occupational discrimination against women than did white females ($F=11.35$, $p<.01$). Examination of the mean scores of each race-sex group

on Women Discrimination Total indicates that black females perceived the greatest amount of occupational discrimination against women, whereas white females perceived less discrimination against women than any of the other three race-sex groups.

DISCUSSION. As anticipated, black respondents perceived significantly more occupational discrimination against black people than did white respondents. Literature documenting the black woman's relative dominance in the black family and the historical superiority of the black woman vis-a-vis the black man in terms of education and entrance to certain white-collar occupations suggested that black female respondents would perceive less discrimination against black people than would be true for black male respondents. Since black males and black females did not differ significantly in their assessments of occupational discrimination against black people, it is suggested that the respondents interpreted the instructions regarding "black people" to mean "black men". Despite the large numbers of women in the labor force, it seems likely that most individuals conceive of employed persons as men.

It is of great interest that black females perceived significantly more occupational discrimination against women than did white females. The heightened sensitivity of black females to discrimination against women in general does not appear to be a function of sensitivity carried over from the experience of racial discrimination, for white males and black males did not differ in their assessments of occupational discrimination against women. White females did not perceive more

occupational discrimination against women than did white males. In fact, the mean scores of the race-sex groups on Women Discrimination Total indicated a tendency for white females to perceive less discrimination against women than did both white and black male respondents. It is suggested that black female respondents and black and white male respondents are motivated to make realistic assessments of the occupational opportunity structure, inasmuch as meaningful involvement or investment in an occupational career is a realistic expectation for these three groups. However, the anticipated primary investment of most white females is in a home and family rather than in an occupational career. Hence, it is suggested that white females perceived so little occupational discrimination against women because they may not need to "test reality" as accurately as do males and black females. Few of the white females may have become sufficiently invested in occupational advancement to subjectively experience discrimination on the basis of sex.

In interpreting the results of this study, it is of great interest that, as implied by responses to a variety of socialization to achievement items, white parents differentiate by sex in socialization to achievement, but black parents do not. Chi-square analyses were used to test the relationship of race and sex to several items tapping socialization toward educational and occupational achievement. For example, indices of socialization included the respondent's age at earliest parental encouragement for college attendance and reports of the highest

degree the respondent's parents hoped for him. When race was controlled, significant differences on both items appeared between white males and white females. Compared to white males, white females reported significantly later encouragement for college attendance (χ^2=11.05, $p < .05$) and lower parental hopes for the respondents' educational attainment (χ^2=209.1, $p < .001$). No significant differences on these two items and a number of similar items were found between black males and black females.

A similar trend appeared on items ascertaining educational expectations and occupational aspirations. When race was controlled, white females were very much more modest than white males regarding educational expectations (χ^2=274.3, $p < .001$) and occupational aspirations (χ^2=543.27, $p < .001$). Black females and males did not differ on educational expectations. The occupational aspirations of black females were significantly lower than those of black males (χ^2=12.33, $p < .001$), but the magnitude of the difference between black males and black females on this item was much less than the difference between white males and females.

These differences in socialization between white and black families may be interpreted as a function of two interacting social processes in the black family: (a) the truncated achievement possibilities of black males; and (b) an accentuated demand for achievement among black females.

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